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ABSTRACT

To investigate teaching practices for English as a foreign/second language (EFL) at the university level in Brazil, three researchers analyzed the research presented at the 1990 Brazilian National Conference of EFL University Teachers (ENPULI Conference). Focus of the analysis was on the main objective of the study and the emphasis placed on different variables: teaching methods; learner characteristics; context; learning processes; and outcomes. It was found that the prevailing tendency was to overemphasize teaching conditions while overlooking learner characteristics and aspects of context. Results suggest a strict view of teaching as a matter of methods and materials, which may lead to short-term solutions instead of more complex accounts of what constitutes the learning process. It is proposed that a global approach to EFL teaching and learning is necessary for successful results. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

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EFL Teaching in Brazil: Emphasizing Conditions, Processes, or Product?

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Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages - 29th Annual Convention
Long Beach, CA, USA - 1995

EFL TEACHING IN BRAZIL: Emphasizing conditions, processes, or product?

Désirée Motta-Roth (Universidade Federal de Santa Maria)
Viviane Heberle and Maria Lúcia Vasconcelos (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina)

This paper discusses current EFL teaching practices in Brazilian universities, calling attention to the prevailing tendency among teachers to overemphasize teaching conditions (e.g., teaching materials) while overlooking learner (e.g., age) and context-related aspects (e.g., social milieu). The results show a strict view of teaching as a matter of methods and materials which in itself may lead to short-term solutions instead of more elaborated accounts of what constitutes the learning process. A more global approach to EFL teaching and learning is proposed as a necessary condition for more successful results.

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies on second language encompass a variety of problems related to how learners create a second language system, what strategies are used by these learners, why learners attain different levels of proficiency, how learning relates to the language being learned, and so on (see Gass and Selinker 1994).

In order to examine how this variety of problems manifests itself in the Brazilian context, the present paper was carried out with a two-fold objective. First to examine the present status of EFL in Brazilian universities, calling attention to the prevailing tendency among teachers to overemphasize teaching conditions while overlooking learner and context related aspects. Secondly, to suggest a more global approach to EFL teaching/learning in the form of an extension of the classic 'The good language learner

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model' by Naiman et al. (1978). A more holistic approach to EFL teaching than the one proposed by both the Naiman et al's model and by the one generally found in university contexts in Brazil constitutes a necessary condition for more successful results.

By 'more successful results' we mean results that can help improve the figures of more than the estimated 3 million dollars wasted yearly by the Brazilian government in underachieving graduate students abroad as a result of their insufficient skills in English (Celani, 1994:37). By 'holistic' we mean a way of looking at EFL teaching that goes beyond the designing of teaching or testing materials — which has been the prevailing tendency in Brazil as reviewed by our analysis — to include independent variables such as the teacher and language-related aspects as independent variables interacting with the learning process and the outcome of this learning (the resulting variables).

METHODOLOGY

To get a picture of the relevant issues in EFL teaching in Brazil we analyzed the proceedings of the 1990 Brazilian National Conference of EFL University Teachers (ENPULI Conference). The first step in our study was to carry out a move analysis of each research article introduction using Swales' CARS model (1990:141) of rhetorical moves and steps to define the focal point of each paper. The identification of the main objective in each research paper in the proceedings was obtained with this qualitative analysis whose results were later quantified in terms of frequency with which the variables were focused on in the ENPULI papers. These results were then interpreted based on

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Naiman et als 'The good language learner' model (seen in Figure 1), which was later used by Skehan (1989) when discussing language learning differences.

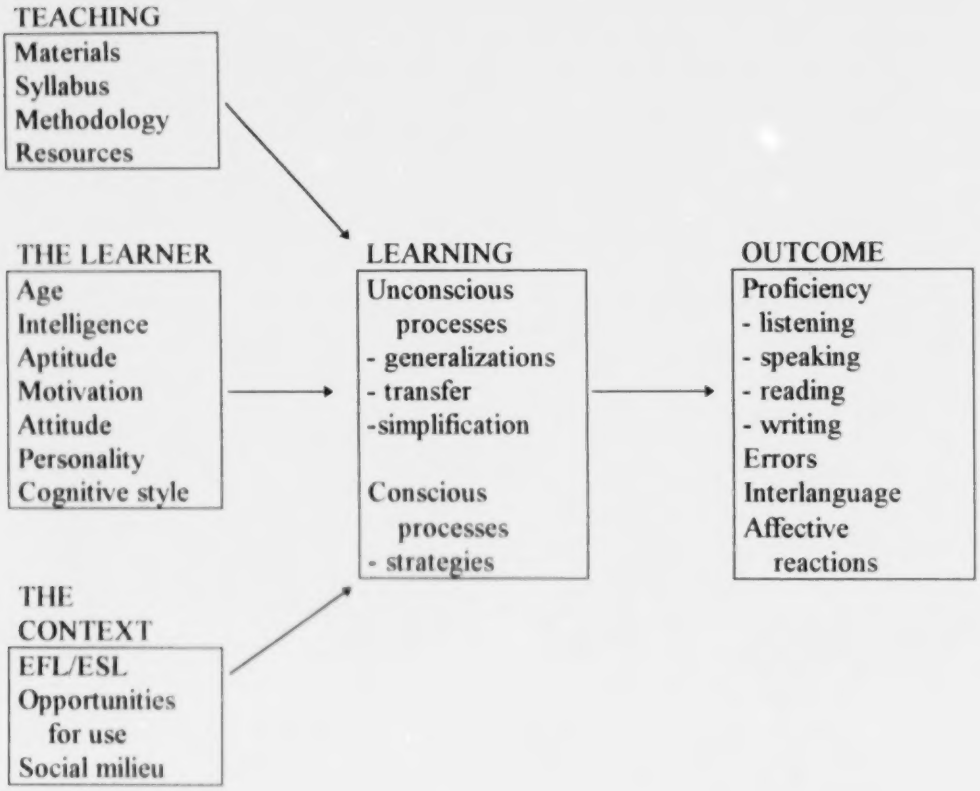

Figure 1 The good language-learner model (Naiman, Frohlich, Todesco, & Stern, 1978)

In the model, Naiman et al. attempt to represent all the variables that interact in the teaching/learning of a language to speakers of other languages (hereafter referred as second language acquisition). There are three independent variables — the learner, the

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context, and teaching — that interact among themselves and two dependent variables — learning and outcome — that result from this interaction.

The variable **Teaching** refers to formal instruction factors such as methodology, curricular planning, testing and teaching materials, teaching aids and financial support available (Skehan 1989:120). The variable **The Learner** concerns those non-linguistic factors that may account for differences in the outcome of individual learners such as variations in age, aptitude, motivation, attitude, and personality (Gass and Selinker, 1994:232). The variable **The Context** considers the nature of learning: natural (informal) and instructional (formal). Here are included attitudes related to the foreign language culture and people, derived from students' experience with the foreign language and with the community of its speakers. Issues linked to the social milieu where learning takes place are also included here, taking into account ideological aspects of EFL teaching. Investigation of the conditions, processes, and results of learning has been carried out via classroom research because of the 'integral role that classroom teaching and learning plays in theoretical and practical proposals' (Chaudron 1988:xv).

The dependent variable **Learning** involves the resources used by learners during their learning process. Such resources, commonly known as learning strategies, include both cognitive strategies (automatic strategies), as making inferences during comprehension and metacognitive strategies (controlled ones), such as directing the attention to the learning task being carried out. A fundamental question in relation to

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research on learning processes refers to the possibility or not of training these strategies to promote knowledge and the development of skills.

Finally, the dependent variable **Outcome** refers to learners' effective production, which can be defined by means of proficiency assessment. To measure learners' linguistic performance implies, however, the definition of a 'point of acquisition' and the forms to recognize it (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991:40). Thus, measures of proficiency and qualitative aspects of performance are included here. We have also considered the analysis of the intermediate production of different learners (or the same learner at different points along the process of SLA), interlanguage, errors, and fossilization detected in learners' production.

According to Skehan (1989:5), such model provides a means to visualize the potential influences in the efficient learning of a foreign language as it also allows us to estimate the degree of interaction between the variables and their different subcategories.

A SUGGESTED VERSION OF A MODEL OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

In our analysis of 'The good language learner model', we observed the absence of two important independent variables: **Language description** and **The teacher**. These have been included in our extension of Naiman et al.'s model as independent variables (see Fig 2).

The inclusion of the variable **Language description** aims to account for theoretical issues about language such as contrastive pragmatics, discourse strategies, sociolinguistic

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aspects, and grammar (see, for example, Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1987) as a way to inform language teaching pedagogies.

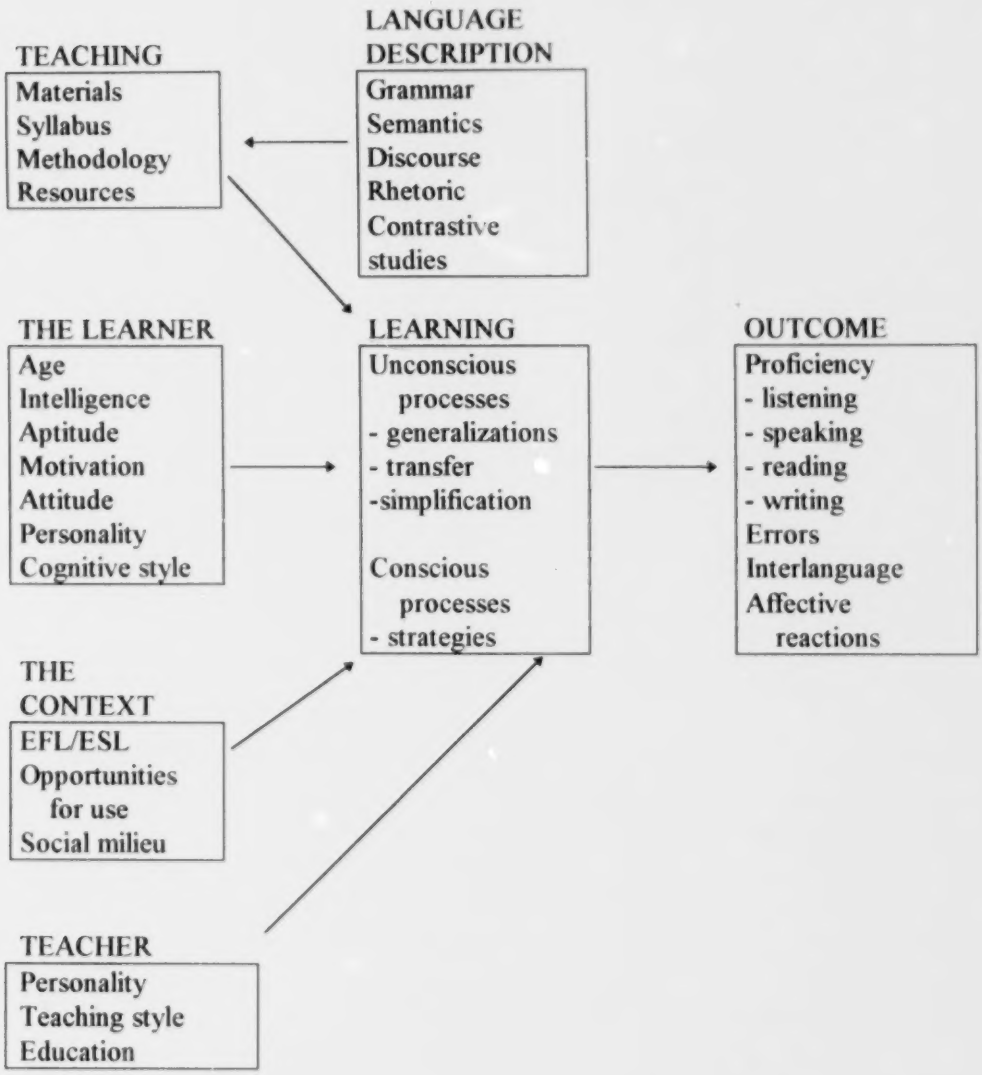

Figure 2 Extension of the good language-learner model (Heberle, Motta-Roth, & Vasconcelos, 1993)

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This variable interacts with the learning process indirectly, through the teaching practice that is theoretically informed. Studies involving description of language-related aspects inform the teaching process, providing theoretical information for the design of syllabi, curricula, materials, tests, etc. Thus **Language description** is directly related to **Teaching**.

The variable **The teacher** includes aspects such as teacher training in the area and has been added to the model to account for current perspectives in research on nonnative-teachers working with formal education in English. Various aspects related to nonnative teachers of English such as discourse strategies, communicative competence, performance, have been seen as relevant source of information to teacher trainers so that they can have a more complete account of what is needed in the training of nonnative teachers of English (Madden and Myers, 1994).

It is worth mentioning that both the independent variables of **learning, the learner, the teacher, context,** and **language description** interact in the learning process of a foreign language, sometimes determining and sometimes being determined by any other variable. One of the analyzed papers entitled "The writing process and the EFL writing curriculum", for instance, aims at examining the process of written production with a view to designing the syllabus for writing pedagogies. Thus syllabus a subcategory within the independent variable **teaching**, in this case, becomes a resulting variable, influenced by **learning.**

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The common influence between subcategories and variables constituting the model suggests the need for studies that examine them in an integrated fashion. Our initial hypothesis is that it would be very difficult to classify the objective and topic of each article as belonging to one subcategory in the seven variables of the model, in spite of the fact that the event was organized around a common theme, 'Evaluation — aims, methods, and testing procedures'. For reasons of analysis, we have connected variables and subcategories focused on in the papers through what we have called 'intersection' (+).

In the next section we will present the results of our analysis of the ENPULI papers, relating the point of interest in each paper to one of the seven variables in the model.

RESULTS

At the 1990 ENPULI conference, participants' papers proved consonant with the theme of the congress since most papers (88.37%) focused on some aspect of teaching conditions, namely the variables **teaching, the learner**, and **the context**. As indicated in Table 1, more than 50% focused on some aspect specifically related to teaching (e.g. syllabus, evaluation, testing) while only 11.63% of the papers were about learning, and none discussed the outcomes of the teaching/learning process.

Table 1 Main focus of the papers presented at the 1990 ENPULI Conference

Topic of Paper	N	%
Teaching Conditions	38	88.37
Learning Process	05	11.63
Outcome	----	----

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TOTAL	43	100

It is interesting to analyze, however, the frequency with which each variable or a combination of more than one variables were focused on in the papers and how some of the presentations focused on factors which 'The good language learner' model does not or cannot account for.

Table 2 Distribution of the ENPULI papers focusing on the independent variables of teaching conditions

Teaching Conditions	N	%
Teaching	24	63.16
Language Description	06	15.79
Context	05	13.16
Teacher	02	5.26
Learner	01	2.63
TOTAL	38	100

Table 2 represents the results obtained in the analysis showing that the ENPULI papers focused on more than one variable not originally included in 'The good language learner' model. These variables in themselves involve such different factors as contrastive studies of specific languages or teacher training and would deserve a more careful

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discussion than this paper can purport to develop. However, we would like to report on a few relevant issues concerning these variables.

The learner and The teacher

As shown in Table 2, only one paper aims at examining learner-related questions such as motivation and cognitive strategies, linking **The learner + Learning.** Two other papers examine the variable **The teacher**. The first discusses the main characteristics of a good language teacher and the second emphasizes the role of meta-awareness raising in training pronunciation with teachers **(The teacher + Teaching + Language description).** Ausubel et al. (1968) stress the difficulty in defining the most relevant characteristics of a good teacher, since this definition involves factors such as teachers' cognitive abilities, personality factors, and teaching style in relation to teaching competence. As a result, little is known about what features are responsible for successful learning.

The context

Five papers considered social aspects such as ideology and expectations towards the foreign language and culture. Three of them concentrate on the cultural influences permeating EFL teaching in Brazil in terms of perception of foreign accent in nonnative performance (+ Outcome), syllabus design, and selection of textbooks. The other two papers investigate the learning environment of the classroom as a context for proposing specific communicative approaches to teaching and as a research instance for the teacher (+Teaching). Classroom research has been increasingly regarded as a basic tool for a solid information on the process of language learning which can directly affect syllabus design

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so that it is consonant with **Teaching** and **Learning** variables (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). In Brazil, the last decade has seen a growing interest of teachers in primary and secondary education for classroom research (Cavalcanti & Moita Lopes, 1991), as a reaction to the lack of research in the area. In addition Applied Linguistics has become an interdisciplinary area, in which researchers bend over questions arising in the everyday situations of language use and language teaching and try to answer them taking SLA theories into account, a shift from more traditional views of the area as the application of linguistic theories and models to practical instances of language teaching (Bastos e Mattos, 1993).

Language description

Six papers considered factors related to **Language description** fundamental to teaching practices. Topics such as how differences in gender may affect language, analysis of academic and newspaper texts, contrastive studies in grammar (verbal aspect) and intonation were analyzed here. These studies can contribute to a better understanding of the linguistic system of the foreign language and how it differs from the first language. They can, thus, offer contributions to teachers working with theories centered on learner's cognitive processes so as to facilitate language acquisition through metaawareness development. In research on reading as an interactive process, for example, there has been a growing interest in language features as possible determinants of success in reading. In our study the theme in these studies was placed in the intersection between **language description** and **teaching.**

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Teaching

Table 3 shows the subcategories of the variable **Teaching**: Methodology, Syllabus, Materials, and Testing, with the distribution of the papers that had them as a central issue. It is interesting to note that, although the conference was about testing, this subcategory did not receive massive attention, with only three papers discussing elaboration and assessment in testing, establishing intersections with **Learning.** Methodology, on the other hand, was discussed in several papers.

Table 3 Distribution of the ENPULI papers focusing on the variable 'Teaching'

Subcategories of 'Teaching'	N	%
Methodology	10	41.67
Syllabus	06	25
Materials	05	20.83
Testing	03	12.5
TOTAL	24	100

• Methodology

In Methodology, five papers discuss procedures and practices in teaching reading. This concentration on one specific ability can be accounted for by the great interest in reading as an instrumental skill for academic purposes which arose in the 1980's. In Brazil this interest resulted in the National Project of English for Specific Purposes in Brazilian Universities (Celani et al., 1988) which involved all the main universities and launched the

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massive creation of special courses of ESP across disciplines. The remaining papers are about a variety of topics: the use of drama techniques in teaching, the development of oral competence, and the implications of information processing models for the learning process. All of the methodology papers were circumscribed to one specific issue without interfacing with other subcategories or variables, and this in itself constitutes an issue for discussion: how informed by concrete classroom situations is a research on methodology if it does not explicitly consider learner's strategies or language descriptions? Or does it need to be informed by classroom data at all?

- Syllabus and Materials

Three papers concentrated on EFL syllabi, discussing parameters to be matched for communicative and linguistic competence, the role of literature in language teaching and the development of reading syllabus. Studies focusing on EFL syllabi produced three intersections: Syllabus + **The Learner** + **The Teacher**, arguing for course design focusing on students' and teachers' needs.

The other three studies analyzed Syllabus in respect to other variables such as **the learner, the teacher, language description** suggesting that in syllabus design, one should attend to students' and teachers' needs and interests and should also consider the role of grammar in EFL teaching. The studies argued for a more global approach in the examination of issues related to teaching.

Papers about Materials specially addressed the use of videotapes in the classroom. Audio-Video resources have been increasingly used in EFL classrooms in Brazil for the

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obvious advantage of providing a richer communicative environment for the students to learn language in context.

- Testing

Few papers discussed Materials (20.83%) and testing (12.5). This information would be irrelevant if the topic for the ENPULI conference were not Testing. If we consider that more than 55% of the papers involved some aspect of **Teaching**, and that within this variable, more than 85% of the studies discussed the subcategories of Methodology, Syllabus, and Materials, leaving only 12.5% of the studies to deal with Testing, we can at least assume that EFL in Brazil has been consistently giving more emphasis to teaching conditions than to the evaluation of the process or the outcome obtained from classroom instruction. The results of this analysis, however, should not be considered as an isolated symptom but should be regarded as one more element in a greater didactic structure.

In the Brazilian educational system, the classroom has traditionally been considered an instance for teaching and learning about specific linguistic topics, with rare examples of research activity concerning the detailed examination and critical reflection on the problems involving the pedagogical practice. About this issue, two well-known Brazilian applied linguists, Cavalcanti and Moita Lopes (1991:133) argue that teaching training has repeatedly ignored the develpment of a language teacher both interested and informed about research activities.

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Learning

Only five (11.63%) out of the 43 papers investigated learning in more detail, and of these only two studied learning in association with teaching. One of them discusses the process of acquisition of writing in relation to syllabus design and the other investigates the processes involved in learning and the way these processes can be facilitated by instruction. As for the three last works, they focus on issues of input processing, both from the perspective of conscious and unconscious strategies, without any explicit linking with testing.

Outcome

None of the papers studied **the outcome** of learning. This may seem surprising in the sense that the analysis of the learner's linguistic production should, in principle, guide instructional questions such as objectives, programs, testing, syllabi.

CONCLUSION

In the present paper, we have first specified the main variables in the process of language learning, proposing an extension of 'The good language learner model'. Two more variables were added to the original model, **language description** and **the teacher**, so that the model could account for important interactive factors in the complex process of learning a foreign language.

Secondly we have analyzed and classified the papers published in the proceedings of the 1990 ENPULI conference to define the main topic and objective of each article published in the proceedings. Considering the extension proposed for the model by

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Naiman et al., in which language learning is represented as a complex process whose constitutive variables interact among themselves, we would expect a greater proportion of papers examining different combinations of variables in comparison to papers investigating isolated aspects.

Contrary to what may be expected in a conference that has as its theme 'Evaluation — aims, methods, and testing procedures', few papers offered a combined view of evaluation relating it to other aspects in the model. Three variables were addressed in a small number of papers: **the learner, outcome,** and **the teacher**. We would expect papers about evaluation to discuss teaching aspects such as syllabus, methodology, or textbooks. Furthermore, since testing was under consideration, it would be interesting to consider not only the process of elaborating tests but also the process of evaluating its efficacy through the analysis of students' performance in these tests.

Few papers focused on fundamental elements in the process of language learning, **the teacher** and **the learner,** and still only marginally. The variable teacher should be regarded more carefully since it is the teacher who is the agent responsible for the interaction of the variables of context, teaching, and language description which directly feed into the **learning** process (Ausubel et al., 1968:498). The fact that learners' individual differences were overlooked when discussing syllabus and evaluation is of great relevance: how can we think about issues related to teaching when we ignore those that we are supposed to be teaching? The past decade saw an increase in the number of studies about learners' differences (see, for example, Skehan, 1989; Spolsky, 1989; Ellis, 1985)

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from different perspectives. Researchers studied the learner's social, cognitive, affective characteristics and how they influenced the learning rate and success. Thus, the discussion of learners' differences could at least provide elements for the examination of testing methods.

In the last decade, research has tended to examine the process of language learning from a more elaborated perspective, going beyond methods and materials. Although we recognize the importance of these factors, EFL teachers seem to be searching in them the answer for questions encompassing other factors such as **the teacher**, **the learner**, or **the outcome**. In the context of EFL teaching in Brazil, a strict view of teaching as a matter of methods and materials may lead to short-term solutions instead of more elaborated accounts of what constitutes the learning process.

A more integrated view of different aspects than the one reviewed by the analysis of the papers and of 'The good language learner model' is needed so that we may be able to see the teaching-learning process in its totality. In fact, as Gass and Selinker (1994:1) have pointed out, the study of how a second language is learned 'impacts on and draws from many areas of study, such as linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, education, to name a few.'

The results obtained in our analysis indicate the need for further research that contemplates various interrelated aspects. As stated by Brown (1987), language learning research is a task that involves apparently an infinite number of interrelated variables, and should not, therefore, be reduced to only one aspect within the totality of the process.

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